

Unquantifiable by EvieSmallwood

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Cuddles, F/M, Hearteyes, Like, This is pure fluff, cuteness, frogface, straight up

Language: English

Characters: Eleven, Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-04-25

Updated: 2018-04-25

Packaged: 2022-04-22 04:41:29

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,458

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

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“Amphibian?” Mike inquires, pronouncing it gently as he lies on his stomach beside her.

“Amphibian,” El repeats, studying the word. “What is it?”

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Author's Note:

Originally posted on my tumblr: @mad-maxxy

“Mike?”

He’s hunched over on her bed, totally captivated by his science textbook. He doesn’t even blink when she says his name.

“Mike.”

Still, his attention won’t waver. El huffs, throwing herself dramatically against the mattress.

Nothing.

Pursing her lips, she eyes the book. Suddenly, at least to him, it starts to float—two inches off his lap, and then when he leans away in surprise, it skyrockets up toward the ceiling, smacks against it, and comes back down. It falls open against her dusty floorboards.

“El!”

“You were ignoring me,” she says.

“I was studying,” he corrects, going to retrieve it. Just as he’s about to grasp it, the book shoots into her open palm. “Seriously, El?”

“I’m bored,” she announces. El scans the page idly as he comes back over. “What’s an... an amp-amphib—”

“Amphibian?” Mike inquires, pronouncing it gently as he lies on his stomach beside her.

“Amphibian,” El repeats, studying the word. “What is it?”

“Uh, well... It’s an ectothermic vertebrae, which means it has bone structure; invertebrates don’t have those, or nervous systems or anything—”

“Ectothermic?”

Mike bites his lip. Then he grabs her free hand. “Feel me,” he says, laying her palm flat against his cheek (soft, smooth). “I’m warm, see? Cold blooded animals aren’t. That’s ectothermic.”

That makes sense. Everything makes sense when he explains it. “Vertebrae have bones,” she repeats, keeping her hand where it is (if the way his face flushes, *warmer*, is any indication, he notices). “Invertebrates don’t.”

“Right,” he breathes.

“So what’s an amphibian?”

“It’s like, an animal that usually lives near water—sometimes they’re born in water, and they don’t have scales like reptiles—like snakes and crocodiles and stuff.”

“Reptiles,” she repeats. It sounds familiar; she thinks she’s heard the word on TV before.

“Amphibians are like, toads or frogs or—”

“Frogs?”

This catches his attention. He stops talking. “Uh, yeah.”

El pokes his cheek. “Like you?”

His face gets even redder. “Um, I mean, not really—”

“Frog-face,” she says, poking him again.

Mike’s brow furrows. “I don’t look like a—”

“You do,” El grins, tossing the book aside and wrapping her arms around his neck. “It’s cute.”

His expression changes in a heartbeat; lips changing tilt, eyes brightening. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” El nods, which makes their noses touch.

He leans down a little closer, so that their lips are almost touching (and her heart is slamming against her sternum, eyes fluttering closed). “*Ribbit.*”

She doesn’t know why it makes her laugh so hard, but the next thing she knows she’s curled up on her side and giggling while he presses small kisses to her cheek. “*Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit—*”

“*Mike!*”

He kisses the crease in her skin (dimple, that’s what Joyce had called it). “*Ribbit.*”

Mike wraps his arms around her. Their legs intertwine. His nose brushes up against her cheek, cool but not cold. “You think I’m cute?”

“Maybe,” she grins, pressing her finger into his side. “You’re acting like a dog.”

“Yeah?” he holds her tighter, sniffing and mock-slobbering in her ear.

El bursts into giggles. “Mike, stop!”

“No way!”

“Get off!”

He blows air against the side of her head—a raspberry; she’d learned that from Hopper—which only makes her laugh harder.

There’s only one thing to do.

He’s floating; up and off of her, toward the other side of the bed, protesting and flailing his arms. “Holy shit, put me down—”

“Ask nicely.”

“What?”

A foot higher.

“What’s the magic word?”

“El! Oh my god!”

“Nope,” another foot. His eyes widen.

“El—”

Two more feet—he’s halfway to the ceiling and inching higher with every second.

“Holy shit,” he breathes.

His back presses against the wood above her, and then all the panic seems to leave him. He refocuses on her face, grinning. “*Holy shit.*”

El lies down on her back. “Cool?”

“Really cool,” he says, gingerly reaching out to touch the panelling.
“Wow...”

“Now you’re like a starfish,” she observes. “What kind of animal is that?”

“An echinoderm,” Mike still isn’t looking at her; he’s too busy taking in her room from an aerial perspective.

“Echinoderm,” El echoes, testing the word. Again, slower,
“*Echinoderm.*”

Mike looks at her. “You’re so freaking awesome.”

El smiles. “I have a star on my ceiling.”

He smiles, a little goofy-looking, so wide his face must hurt a little.
“Hi.”

“Hi.”

“What’s your favourite colour?”

She thinks, chewing on her answer. “Blue. What’s yours?”

“Yellow.”

“Do you think I’m cute?”

“Very,” he replies, equally as quick as his first answer. “Can you like, move me around?”

El bites her lip. It’s not too much strain, just doing this, but her head is already beginning to ache. Still, who cares? She complies, directing him with her eyes and mind—a little too forceful at first (he crashes into the wall, gleefully proclaiming it’s like he’s in space) but then slower, safer, around the room.

Then toward her.

He hovers an inch or so above her, hand against the mattress.
“What’s up?”

“You, dummy,” she says.

El wraps her arms and legs around him, pulling him all the way down and relinquishing her mental hold. No blood; ever since the gate it’s been easier.

Mike lets out a small yelp when he falls, but it’s only a short distance. El burrows her face into his chest. Detergent, mint soap, Mrs. Wheeler’s peanut butter cookies. *Mike*.

“You know, I have to study.”

“You already know everything.”

“Do not.”

“Most things,” El sighs, looking up at him (he’s already looking down at her; she loves that, though she doesn’t know why). “Thirty-nine.”

“What?”

“Thirty-nine freckles,” she leans up and kisses his nose. “Pretty.”

Mike blushes. “Oh.”

“Mm-hmm,” El nods, kissing the corner of his mouth, which only

makes it rise (which, in turn, makes her stomach flip). “Really pretty.”

They stay like that. Time passes. El plays with their intertwined fingers, rubbing her thumb across his knuckles, tracing the lines of his palm.

“I’m hot.”

“Mm-hmm.”

Mike makes a choking noise. “Um,” he stammers. “I meant—”

“Homograph,” El says, bringing his fingers to her lips. She kisses them lightly, feeling dizzy.

“Oh,” Mike breathes. “Okay. Yeah. Won’t Hopper be home soon?”

“Who cares?” El rolls her eyes. She pulls him closer by his torso. “Stay. Forever.”

He laughs. “Forever?”

“Yeah,” El is practically draped over him, face buried in the crook of his neck.

“I gotta do my homework.”

“No.”

“El.”

“Nope.”

“*El*.”

“No.”

Mike sighs, head falling against the bed. “Really?”

“Not moving,” El squeezes him. “I’m comfy.”

“I’m dying.”

“Don’t.”

“Don’t what?” He chuckles.

“Die, ever,” El elaborates. “I’d explode.”

Mike laughs for real. “Really?”

“Definitely.” She’s totally serious. Why is he laughing? “I love you, Mike.”

Then he’s quiet; like the air has been punched out of his lungs. He just stares at her—blinking once, and then twice. “What?”

“I love you,” El kisses his chin, the easiest place to reach without straining.

A beat. “What?”

“You’re stupid,” She informs him, tapping his forehead. “I said I love you, dummy. Can you hear?”

“Oh,” he blinks again. “Really?”

“Really.”

“*Really*, really?”

She gives up. “*Mike*.”

“Okay,” he sucks in a breath, and then swallows. “Wow.”

“You saved me,” she shrugs. “You’re the best person in the whole world. Of course I love you.”

“I...” Mike hesitates, and then all of the sudden El is on her back and he’s looking down at her, brow furrowed, hand on her cheek. “I love you too.”

When he says it, with all that emotion—with the way his eyes glisten a little, with how hard it seems to be to breathe, it takes something out of her. “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Mike grins. “I know, right?”

“I love you,” she repeats, experimentally.

“I love you too.”

El pecks his cheek. “I love you.”
His other, “so much.”

“How much?”

She thinks for a moment. A long time, really. “How big is the universe?”

“It doesn’t really have a size,” he tells her, flopping onto his side and gazing at her. “It just grows, all the time.”

“That’s how much, then,” El settles against his chest. “What about you?”

He pinches his fingers together. “That much.”

From his smirk, she can tell he’s joking. El makes an outraged noise, before reaching and tickling his sides. He starts laughing, and it’s the best thing ever. The best sound (even when it’s sort of muffled against the pillow she whacks on his face).

“I’m kidding!” He gasps, practically desperate.

El tickles him some more. “How much?”

“Unquantifiable,” he blurts.

El pauses. “What?”

“That’s the word,” Mike catches his breath. “Can’t be measured.”

“Unquantifiable,” El repeats.

Mike nods. “Can I study, now?”

El wastes no time crawling back on him. “Never.”

“Never?”

“Never *ever.*”

Author's Note:

Thank you for reading <3